

My Writing Process

By Peter David Smith

Everybody talks to themselves sometimes.

Maybe when your car begins to make a weird noise and you say "Oh, no! Don't do that!" even though the car can't hear you and there's nobody else there so you're talking to yourself but you needed to say something about that sudden noise which could mean your car is about to break down. Panic!

Maybe when the DJ on the radio says "Do you remember what you were doing when this song was a hit?" and he plays some ghastly record and you're standing there in the kitchen, washing the dishes, and you say "That song was never a hit. It barely got in the top 50!"

Maybe when you have an argument with someone and you get home and you're still angry and you're going over the details of the argument in your mind and saying things out loud that you feel like you should have said then but it's too late now because the argument is over.

But you still need to work through it, and talking out loud helps.

Well, that's my process. That's the process I use for my writing.

I talk out loud when there's nobody else there to hear me.

A lot.

I go over and over the events of my life and I sort it all out. What I said. What other people said. What was right. What was wrong. What I should have said. What I shouldn't have said. What I thought then. What I think now.

And not only things which happened. Things which didn't happen too. And people who don't even exist because they're fictional characters that I've just made up or they're fictional versions of people I used to know or combinations of several people or famous actors known for playing specific types of character.

The story I wrote about a gas station in the desert developed out of conversations I had with Christopher Lee and Vincent Price - but only in my head. I never actually met either of those gentlemen.

It helps that I am a recluse. That I don't have cats or dogs or flatmates or partners or family. I'm lucky in that I am a natural hermit type of person. If I lived with other people they wouldn't understand my ranting at thin air. Then, eventually, when I'm ready, writing it all into a story or an essay.

I never kept a diary but many events of my life are very fresh in my mind by virtue of all the times I've been over it, reliving the situations, reviewing what it meant to me and how it affected my development as a person.

I remember the time when I was about fourteen and I used to go to all the newsagents along the roads of Sutton and Carshalton, searching the rotating comic racks in each shop to make sure that I never missed a wanted, needed, Marvel or DC comic.

These comics were imported to the UK by a company called Thorpe and Porter who put a random selection of each month's comics into a pack which was then delivered to the newsagent shops. The randomness of the process meant that some shops would get the latest Fantastic Four and Green Lantern and Doctor Strange while other shops would get the latest J.L.A. and Daredevil and Batman. The thing was that no newsagent had *all* the month's latest American comics.

Therefore, after I had got paid my week's wages from my paper round, I had to go to a whole series of different shops, checking the rotating display stands, to make sure I never missed an issue of any of the important ones.

The problem arose one Saturday afternoon when I bought several comics in a shop and then proceeded to the next shop along Carshalton Road to check the rotating display stand in that one.

While I was checking the display stand a customer suddenly grabbed hold of me and took my comics out of my pocket. He declared me to be a thief and he acted as though he was the hero of the hour, having supposedly apprehended a thief. He gave my comics (MY COMICS WHICH I HAD BOUGHT) (MY COMICS WHICH BELONGED TO ME) (MY COMICS WHICH HE, IN FACT, WAS STEALING - SO HE WAS THE THIEF, NOT ME) to the shopkeeper who was standing behind the counter. I explained that I had bought those comics in the other shop BUT the triumphalistic customer called me a liar.

After the vigilante customer had left the shop I implored the shopkeeper to keep the comics under the counter long enough for me to run back to the other shop and get a receipt or equivalent from the other shopkeeper. He agreed and I ran back as fast as I could to the other shop and breathlessly explained the situation.

The lady in that shop gave me a letter to take to the man in the other shop to prove that I had bought the comics in her shop and wasn't a thief.

Then I ran as fast as I could back to the other shop, presented the proof and got my comics back.

Now, the significance of these remembered events is that they left a psychological mark on me to this very day. Even now, at the age of 72, I still feel slightly paranoid whenever I'm in a shop, feeling that someone is going to falsely accuse of stealing things. To this very day I still make sure that I always have receipts for everything.

As I say, I never kept a diary. I didn't have to keep a diary because I'm forever running through my mind all these type of events from my past.

My head is absolutely chock-a-block with memories of all kinds, including the traumatic ones.

In the mid 1980s I had an experience of writer's block for a while. I got through it by making up stories about a lot of big concrete blocks and just kept writing gibberish rubbish fantasy nonsense about these sinister concrete blocks until I had some pages written of all that, ideas coming straight out of my subconscious. Those concrete blocks carved themselves into graven idols.

Anyway, I found the storytelling part of my brain because it was there all the time, ranting about things. Once I realised that, all I had to do was write it all down.

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